



Missouri Governor — Michael L. Parson
Office of Communications

2024 State of the State Address – PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

Governor Mike Parson

Thank you Lieutenant Governor Kehoe, Mr. Speaker, statewide officials, members of the General Assembly, esteemed guests...

AND it is my honor to welcome...for the first time in our state's history... Judges of the first ever female-majority Supreme Court of Missouri.

It is an honor to be joined by the First Lady as I'm welcomed to the dais for the final time as the 57th Governor of the Great State of Missouri.

During our time as Governor, we've accomplished more than any of us probably thought was ever possible. BUT I wouldn't be standing here today without my support system...my family. AND that's where I want to start.

First and foremost, the First Lady... Teresa has been by my side every step of the way. AND after 38 years of marriage, I wouldn't be the Husband, Father, Gramps, or Governor I am today without her.

Thank you for serving in a role you never asked for but doing it each and every day with grace and a passionate commitment to best serve the people of Missouri.

Ladies and gentleman, your distinguished First Lady of the great state of Missouri...

Would my family please stand to be recognized?

Like the legislators in this room and Missourians across the state...my faith, family, and the next generations are the driving force behind the change we have made in Missouri.

AND last year when I stood before you, I highlighted many of our historic achievements we've accomplished together...

As we laid out bold and historic proposals, I declared that this Governor...this Dad...and this Gramps...is not done yet...

We are not done yet...and while that's still true, I'm here to tell you...We're getting close.

After serving six sessions in the House, six sessions in the Senate, two sessions as Lt. Governor, and now my sixth and final session as your 57th Governor...I am expected to say this is a bittersweet moment.

BUT while the view from this dais facing all of you is a fine sight to see...it's no comparison to the view of the Polk County fields behind the windshield of my John Deere tractor.

But look...I promise to think of all of you...on occasion.

BUT in all seriousness, I'll be leaving here with my head held high...

Because like many of you who came here for the right reasons...We never wavered from those wise words on our Capitol and inscribed in our state seal...

"Let the good of the people be the supreme law."

In every decision we make, we must look to the effects on the next generations and the ability for them to achieve their American Dream. In every decision, we must PUT PEOPLE FIRST.

Easy said, but hard to do...it's a simple idea that has been our guiding principle since the very beginning.

AND that's our final commitment to you. Until our final day...we'll continue to put people first.

When I became Governor, Missourians were tired of the turmoil, political infighting, and self-involved personalities. They were tired of quitters...

AND when I first stepped into the Governor's Office, amidst the thousands of camera clicks, hundreds of shouting questions, and countless state, local, and national media...we CLOSED the chapter on scandal and began a new direction...because there was NO TURNIN' BACK.

We declared a fresh start and the return of stability. We committed to ensuring the next generations have their opportunity at the American Dream. We promised the return of integrity to state government...

AND above all we promised to return a people first mentality. AND today, I firmly believe we have DONE just that.

Every year, we have approved conservative and balanced budgets. We have maintained our AAA credit rating and we've ALWAYS left funds on the bottom line.

Actually, with the budget we outline today...we will leave office with over \$1.5 billion dollars on the bottom line, which has never been done before in our state's history.

We're also pleased to report that we have paid down Missouri's debt by over \$600 million dollars, leaving the state with 53 percent less debt than when we started.

That is quite the contrast compared to what we are seeing happen in Washington D.C., In Missouri, we don't leave future generations to pick up the tab. We pay our bills, and we put people first...

Working with all of you, balanced and conservative budgets have always been the norm never the exception.

AND we've always been more interested in giving back Missourians' hard-earned dollars rather than spending them.

In turn, that creates jobs, business growth, and increased revenues to the state.

In fact, state revenues have increased 40 percent since 2018. With significant growth coming from sales revenue...not income taxes, not corporate taxes, and not fuel taxes...but from revenue created by Missourians spending their own money. Not government programs.

AND ONE HUGE FACTOR was the three separate tax CUTS we approved... including the largest in our state's history.

We have decreased Missourians' tax burdens by over 20 percent. Unleashing an economic powerhouse in the State of Missouri.

When I became Governor, we were ranked 42nd for GDP growth and last among our Midwest neighbors. Today, we are ranked 23rd in the nation and Top 5 in the Midwest for GDP growth.

That's a real reckoning here in Jefferson City. That's not all talk and hot air, that's a true reckoning of growth and opportunity that Missourians have come to expect from this administration and state government.

That's our leadership creating a real formula for success, and that's something all of us should celebrate in this chamber.

Overall, Missouri now has the 13th lowest tax burden of any state in the nation.

AND under our Administration, our unemployment rate fell to 2.1 percent, the lowest rate ever recorded in our state's history. Actually, it has been so low that our problem is not creating jobs but filling jobs.

Since becoming Governor, we've added more than 110,000 jobs to our economy and closed out the year ranked 15th nationally for job creation.

Today, as I stand before you for the final time as Missouri's 57th Governor... I declare that the State of our State is stronger than it has ever been.

We've done it all by putting people first...AND that started with state government.

Nothing we do in this room is possible without the dedicated public servants across the state to implement these ideas. BUT when I became Governor, state government was quickly becoming underappreciated, understaffed, and underpaid.

That's why we approved three historic pay increases to recruit and retain quality talent across state government - raising team member pay by over 20 percent since 2018.

AND let me just say: investments in our state employees have been worth EVERY penny.

AND that's why this year we are proposing an additional 3.2 percent cost of living increase for all state employees.

AND representing our more than 47,000 state team members here today is my Cabinet.

Through every crisis, I turned to my Cabinet and their teams not the federal government...AND I always maintained that the answers to our problems are in this state and among our people...

If we just allow ourselves to put egos and self-importance to the side and listen.

AND while they may have already been recognized, I want to ask my Cabinet to stand with me for one last time...

I always say that being a good leader is not about being the best but making those around you better. AND today I thank you and your teams for proving that to be true.

Please join me in giving them another round of applause.

Putting people first is something we implemented across state government because we set the example from the Governor's Office.

From the start, we got straight to work. We completed the largest de-regulation effort in state history, eliminating nearly one out of every five state regulations.

AND during COVID-19, we waived over 600 more regulations. By working with the General Assembly, we made many of these changes permanent in statute and improved the regulatory environment in Missouri.

Because to be honest, many of these rules and laws should have never existed in the first place.

When I became Governor, we also inherited nearly 4,000 pending clemency applications. While I'm a law and order Governor, 4,000 people in limbo waiting for an answer is not how we do good business.

Whether approved or denied, we set out to provide answers. Today, I'm proud to announce that the clemency backlog we inherited has been totally cleared for the first time in decades.

BUT as a former sheriff, this reform did not mean we were letting people out of prisons or forgiving violent criminals, we pardoned people who deserved it...people who had truly turned their lives around...

People like Kenny Batson who joins us here today. In his youth, Kenny was drinking, getting into fights, and found himself on the wrong side of the law. BUT today, Kenny has turned his life completely around.

Kenny is a proud husband and father of three kids. He earned both a bachelor's and master's degree and has been a pastor for more than 20 years, including serving as a hospice chaplain.

Kenny and others like him might have made some mistakes when they were young...but he earned a second chance.

Please join me in recognizing Kenny Batson.

Another way our office has been able to capitalize on historic opportunity is appointing over 155 Missouri judges and three Supreme Court Judges.... Meaning more than 40 percent of the judiciary has been appointed by our administration.

That is more appointments than any Governor in our state's history.

By focusing on core conservative values, we've truly reshaped the judiciary for generations to come. AND guaranteed a judiciary that upholds the law, NOT the politics of the moment.

Additionally, in putting the people of Missouri first, our office put politics aside and appointed five strong statewide office holders, which has never happened before in our state's history.

Lt. Governor Kehoe, Attorney General Bailey, Auditor Fitzpatrick, Treasurer Malek, and though he's not here today, Senator Schmitt...thank you for stepping up and answering the call to serve Missourians. I trust you will never quit on our people and the great State of Missouri.

Today, I want to highlight another one of our quality appointments in the City of St. Louis Circuit Attorney Gabe Gore.

We didn't pick Mr. Gore because of his politics...matter of fact we never even asked...it was because he clearly cared for the people of St. Louis. He valued strong communities, fighting crime, returning law and order...and putting people first.

The level of professionalism between the Circuit Attorney's Office, Metro police, the courts, the Attorney General's Office, and our office is greater than I have ever experienced.

Please join me in recognizing St. Louis Circuit Attorney Gabe Gore.

When the history books tell the story of Missouri's 57th Governor, I hope it's our workforce development and infrastructure accomplishments that stand out.

AND this year, as we propose our final priorities as Governor...there is NO TURNIN' BACK.

We know that guaranteeing Missouri's strong foundation starts with a quality education for our children.

This year, we will once again fully fund the K-12 Foundation Formula with an additional \$120 million dollars over last year's levels.

AND we are also fully funding school transportation across the state of Missouri.

In total, our administration has increased funding for K-12 education by \$700 million dollars since 2018. AND I'll note, that's all state funding...not the federal government.

AND at the same time, our administration and this General Assembly took the first step towards school choice for more Missouri families through our education savings account program.

Whether it be public, private, charter, or Christian... we don't care where Missourians are getting a quality education just as long as they get one.

This year, to do our part on teacher pay, we are including funding to increase teacher baseline pay to \$40,000 dollars per year. This represents a \$15,000 dollar increase for teacher pay during our administration.

We are also recommending \$6 million dollars for Career Ladder.

Together, these programs have benefited tens of thousands of teachers in every corner of our state.

We've also made historic investments in Missouri higher education.

We've increased higher education core funding by 24 percent...and invested \$1.2 billion dollars in state-of-the-art capital improvements and upgrades on our college campuses.

In this year's budget, we included another 3 percent core increase for our four-year institutions and community colleges

AND \$54 million dollars for MoExcels workforce training programs on our college campuses.

When I graduated high school, I went straight into the workforce and joined the United States Army...and for me there was no turnin' back.

My path is similar to many Missourians, as nearly 60 percent of our workforce don't have college degrees. AND that's okay because we all know it doesn't take a college education to be successful.

Since 2018, we have helped establish, upgrade, and transform 57 career and technical education institutions across our state. More of our young people are earning a quality skill, certificate, or credential that will help secure them a good-paying job without a college degree.

We are also upskilling our current workforce and helping them secure the skills they need to succeed. Since its upgrade in 2019, Missouri One Start has helped train more than 173,000 workers.

Additionally, since its creation, our Fast Track program has benefited over 1,700 students, with more than 55 percent going into healthcare AND more than two-thirds being women.

We have also made tremendous progress by prioritizing apprenticeships in this state. AND joining us today are some of the individuals who have benefited from our historic support.

In the upper gallery, we have...

- Isaac Lough [Low] from Four Rivers Career Center...
- Kayla Putnam an apprentice and Army Reservist from Springfield,
- AND Ricky Schmoll, who is a trucking apprentice from Pleasant Hill.

I firmly believe that with hard work, determination, and a skill of some kind anyone can achieve the American Dream. AND these individuals are proving it.

Please join me in recognizing these hard-working folks and others like them across our state.

This group represents just a sample of the more than 57,000 new apprenticeship we have added since becoming Governor. Under our administration, yearly apprenticeship activity in Missouri has grown by 100 percent.

That's why this year we are including another \$3 million dollar investment to support even more youth apprenticeship opportunities. As you can see, these targeted investments truly make a difference in the lives of Missourians.

AND thanks to our past efforts, I'm proud to report that Missouri is ranked 2nd in the United States for apprenticeships. AND that's something we should all be proud of.

Like any challenge in this state, we rise to it...not hide from it. This year, we are also investing another \$10 million dollars for advanced semiconductor research, development, and skills training...as well as nearly \$7 million dollars to support critical mineral development in Missouri.

Missouri ranks 4th in the nation for new manufacturing...when it comes to semiconductors and critical minerals...we can lead...AND we will lead to ensure we never have to rely on nations like China again.

Another focus in the workforce development arena that the First Lady and I are especially proud of is JAG Missouri.

JAG includes students who may be struggling academically, who may have found themselves in some trouble, or are high-risk.

When we first began the JAG initiative back in our Lt. Governor days, JAG was supporting just six programs and serving 225 students.

Today, JAG Missouri supports 112 programs and serves more than 4,000 Missouri students with a high school graduation rate of 98 percent.

AND that's thanks in large part to the First Lady for taking this program under her wing.

In the upper gallery, we have current and former JAG students joining us today. Thanks to JAG, these students are well on their way...whether that's college, the military, or straight into the workforce.

AND with your help, we can support this life-changing program with an investment of \$3.8 million dollars.

BUT if you choose not to stand behind these students in the upper gallery and the thousands like them across the state...it won't be me you have to answer to...but the First Lady herself.

Please join me in giving the JAG students and specialists here with us today a round of applause for their exceptional work.

When it comes to preparing Missourians for the workforce, we know we are on solid ground. The biggest thing we can do is simply continue.

But today our state is in critical need of quality early learning programs.

Business leaders estimate that lack of early learning programs is costing our state over \$1 billion dollars annually. AND over 85 percent of Missourians believe early childhood learning supports a child's success, parents' success, and business success.

BUT today, we have the capacity to serve just 39 percent of Missouri children in licensed facilities. It's time for change.

This year, alongside Senator Arthur and Representative Shields, we are again proposing three new child care tax credit programs.

These programs will help improve access and affordability for families seeking child care across the state of Missouri.

Additionally, we are continuing funding for the expansion of pre-kindergarten programs.

These are commonsense measures that are good for business, great for families, and best for all Missouri children.

Joining us today is Katherine Godier [Goh-Dee-Er] and her child Theo who utilize Missouri's child care subsidy. Yet, Katherine still finds it difficult to afford quality child care.

Katherine is a full-time nursing student that uses Mineral Area College's early learning program...without help, she's not sure she could afford or find care for Theo.

Katherine only wants the best possible education for Theo. Something I think we can all agree should be the minimum for every child in Missouri.

That's why this year we are proposing a \$52 million dollar investment in Missouri's child care subsidy program to make sure infants, toddlers, and children like Theo can receive the quality care they need and deserve.

Please join me in welcoming Katherine, Theo, and Program Director Jennifer Sikes from Mineral Area College.

Another issue affecting Missouri children is the fentanyl crisis.

Drugs pouring into our country through the southern border is devastating Missouri families. Last year, dozens of Missouri children were lost due to fentanyl exposure.

This year, alongside Senator Thompson-Rehder and Representative Parker, we are proposing legislation that guarantees stricter punishments for exposing children and minors to fentanyl.

The fentanyl crisis is here and is tearing families and communities apart. Children dying from fentanyl is 100 percent preventable.

AND while President Biden and the federal government fail to do their job by securing our southern border...Missouri WILL ACT.

We are also protecting Missouri children and our most vulnerable by supporting Attorney General Andrew Bailey's plan to find, prosecute, and punish human traffickers in the State of Missouri.

Together, these initiatives are not only pro-children and pro-family BUT pro-life as well.

AND speaking of pro-life, I want to take this opportunity to highlight our historic success in Missouri's FIGHT FOR LIFE.

When I came to Jefferson City, nearly 8,000 elective abortions were performed annually in Missouri. As I stand before you today...I'm proud to report that number is ZERO.

Now, on to another priority of this administration - roads, bridges, and Missouri's infrastructure. While road and bridge repair might not be the most exciting topic...it is one that impacts all Missourians the most.

Infrastructure was one of the first major initiatives we took on.

AND five and half years ago, working with all of you, we set out to repair or replace 250 of Missouri poorest bridges.

For the first time in our state's history, we leveraged general revenue and bonding authority to fund our Focus on Bridges program.

The way in which we created this program allowed us to pull down additional funds to not only repair 250 overlooked and crumbling Missouri bridges...

BUT it freed up additional resources for major projects like the Buck O'Neil bridge, I-270 North, and the new Rocheport bridge.

Many doubted it could ever happen, but as I stand before you today, I say mission accomplished.

Focus On Bridges...COMPLETE. I-270 North...FINISHED...AND by this time next year, we fully expect Rocheport and Buck O' Neil to be completed... as... promised

We truly believe that our Focus on Bridges program will be THE model moving forward...because although focus was in the name, it doesn't mean everything else stopped.

In total, under our administration, we have repaired or replaced over 1,000 bridges across our state.

We've repaired nearly 17,000 miles of Missouri roadway in five short years. That's about 50 percent of Missouri's entire highway system that has been repaired or replaced.

AND I'll remind you, we have the 7th largest system in the nation.

As for rural Missouri, with an unprecedented funding of \$200 million dollars, nearly 2,000 miles of lettered roads have... been... completed.

When I became Governor, our Statewide Transportation Improvement Program for infrastructure projects across the entire state stood at \$2.5 billion dollars. Today, our STIP is funded at nearly \$14 billion dollars.

AND joining us today in the upper gallery are the men and women who are making it all happen.

Each of these eight men and women represent over 130 years of experience and the more than 4,600 MoDOT employees across our state.

Under our administration, we've kept this group busy. So please join me in recognizing their contributions to our state.

The expansion of I-70 has been talked about in this building for decades...decades of hot air...decades of passing the buck...under our administration, this General Assembly, and the leadership of Senator Hough...decades of inaction turned to ACTION.

This summer, construction on I-70 is set to begin in Columbia. AND from there...well let's just say there is No Turnin' Back.

BUT it's the strategic way in how we chose to fund I-70 that I bring up the project today.

With the smart use of our resources and efficient and effective work ...we are projecting an I-70 completion not only on time but with SAVINGS too.

AND two days ago, we received great news from Congressman Graves that we will be receiving over \$90 million dollars in additional funds to put towards projects on I-70.

With these additional funds and those savings, today, we are announcing our recommendation to establish the I-44 Improvement Fund.

This fund will build on the nearly \$150 million dollars already included in the current STIP.

That's right, we aren't just laying the foundation to expand and improve one interstate across our state... but TWO interstates.

Now, that all sounds good... but, I have more...

Today, we are also ranked 2nd in the United State for capital and bridge projects...9th for improving rural roads, and 11th for the cost-effectiveness and condition of our roadways.

Another important piece of infrastructure is broadband. Working with you, our administration has invested over \$400 million dollars toward broadband expansion ...making tens of thousands of homes, businesses, and farm connections across the state.

Thanks to these efforts, and now, another \$1.7 billion dollars coming to our state through federal funds that former Senator Blunt helped to secure...we believe that in the next five years, the digital divide in Missouri will be closed ONCE AND FOR ALL.

In less than six years, we've accomplished more than most Governors are able to in eight years. AND I'll remind you, we did it all while challenged with some of the most unprecedented events in our state's history.

Whether it was the duck boat crisis, floods, drought, tornadoes, civil unrest, train derailments...Or in 2020, when a global pandemic came knocking at our doors - a crisis that came with no roadmap or playbook...We never backed down or passed the buck.

Have there been critics? Sure... but critics are a dime a dozen.

AND one thing I've learned in life...you'll never be criticized by someone doing more than you...It will always be the person doing less who makes the most noise...

Through all the criticism, we never stopped working for the people of Missouri.

AND for all my like-minded colleagues who stood with me...fought alongside me...and who came here to be a good public servant and PUT PEOPLE FIRST...

I want you to listen closely to what I say next, because these are your wins too.

TOGETHER... We've reshaped our Supreme Court and judiciary as a whole.

We've protected second amendment rights, focused on law and order, and safeguarded Missouri's landmark castle doctrine.

We fought the fight for life – and reduced the number of abortions in our state from 8,000 annually to zero.

We've streamlined state agencies, supported our team members, and reduced the size of state government.

We've built over 1,000 bridges, repaired 50 percent of our entire highway system, and crafted lasting partnerships.

We've cut through nearly 20 percent of regulations on the books and made state government more efficient and effective while unleashing economic development.

We've maintained our AAA credit rating and achieved the lowest unemployment ever recorded in our state's history.

We've paid our bills and left the State of Missouri with 50 percent less debt than when we started.

We've left \$1.5 billion dollars on the bottom line.

We've created over 110,000 jobs and brought \$15 billion dollars in new business investment.

We've cut taxes three times and reduced income tax burdens by over 20 percent with the largest income tax cut in our state's history.

No one and I mean no one has gone to bat for the people of Missouri like this administration and you. AND today... WE... HAVE... WON...

As I begin to wrap up here, I want to recognize another group of special people who helped us make it all happen...

These individuals are truly the best of the best. I couldn't have asked for better people to serve with in the Office of Governor and the six million Missourians across our great state.

They're often overlooked and overworked, but their impact on this state is beyond measure. We've taken on challenges that no one could ever imagine. But they never complained, they never gave up, and, above all, they believed.

They believe in the mission, they believe in our people, and they believe in the extraordinary capabilities of Missourians to achieve an even better tomorrow.

I'm filled with pride that we have public servants of such caliber serving our great state. As the sun begins to set on my public service career, I know their talents will continue benefiting Missourians today, tomorrow, and in the years to come.

To the most loyal and hard-working people I have ever had the honor of working alongside...from the bottom of my heart and on behalf of this entire state...I say THANK YOU!

Would members of my staff, both past and present, please stand to be recognized.

As a final message to this body, I'm reminded of an old saying: "A society grows great when old men and women plant trees... the shade of which they know they will never sit in."

To summarize...it's all about putting people first.

Ladies and gentleman...that's been the focus of this administration. We've planted the seeds today for a better Missouri tomorrow. The First Lady and I may never be able to fully realize the work we've done here alongside all of you.

But that was never the purpose in the first place. The point is that all of our kids and grandkids across this state...THEY WILL.

With Faith, family, and freedom at the forefront...honoring the Constitution and leading with the ideas of the Declaration of Independence...putting people first...that's what leadership has been to us.

In Missouri, our economy is strong, our democracy is strong, our people are strong...and we can keep it that way...If we continue to PUT PEOPLE FIRST.

Missourians took a chance on me and placed their confidence in me and my team to put the people of this state first...you gave me the largest victory margin of any Republican Governor in modern history...and I will forever be grateful.

When I got the call to become Governor, my big brother told me... "LITTLE BROTHER... come back home the same way you're leaving here today...with your head held high."

Well, I'll be keeping that promise... The First Lady and I will be returning to the farm with our heads held high...

AND if we're honored enough to be considered by Missourians as a "pretty good Governor" "decent guy" or "someone who never forgot where he came from"... then it will all be worth it.

Words cannot express the sincere appreciation I have for this state and our people...

So... for one final time before this chamber today... I simply say to the more than 6 million Missourians who I have had the absolute privilege of serving...

It has truly been the honor of my life to be your 57th Governor of the great State of Missouri.

God bless you...God bless the great state of Missouri...and God bless the United States of America.